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ABSTRACT

In recent years a number of institutions have offered the doctoral degree through nontraditional, external programs. The state of Florida has produced a disproportionate number of such graduate programs, including Heed University (Hollywood), Nova University (Fort Lauderdale), and Walden University (Naples). This paper discusses only the Walden University program. It answers the question whether the open admissions policy of Walden has resulted in a high success rate, defined as the awarding of a doctoral degree, for the 449 doctoral candidates enrolling in the 1971, 1972, and 1973 Walden summer sessions. The analysis presupposes that if an open admissions institution has a graduation rate approaching 100 percent, it either must be suspect or markedly superior to the average graduate school. Additionally, available data is examined to ascertain whether the quantity or quality of previous academic work is related to completion of the Walden program. The answer to this question has obvious implications for admissions policy and for decisionmaking by prospective doctoral candidates considering the institution. To the extent that other open-admissions level institutions are similar, the implications may have a wider applicability. (Author/PG)

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OPEN ADMISSIONS AND THE PH.D.: A CASE STUDY OF THE EXTERNAL DOCTORATE DEGREE PROGRAM OF WALDEN UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

In recent years a number of institutions have offered the doctoral degree through non-traditional, "external" graduate programs. Perhaps the most salient example is the Union Graduate School of the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, Yellow Springs, Ohio. The state of Florida has produced a disproportionate number of such graduate programs, including Heed University (Hollywood), Nova University (Fort Lauderdale), and Walden University (Naples).[1]

This paper shall discuss only the Walden University program. It will answer the question whether the "open-admissions" policy of Walden has resulted in a high success rate, defined as the awarding of a doctoral degree, for the 449 doctoral candidates enrolling in the 1971, 1972, and 1973 Walden summer sessions. The analysis presupposes that if an open-admissions institution has a graduation rate approaching 100 per cent, it must be either suspect or markedly superior to the average graduate school.

Additionally, available data will be examined to ascertain whether the quantity or quality of previous academic work is related to completion of the Walden program. The answer to this question has obvious implications for admissions policy and for decision-making by prospective doctoral candidates considering the institution. To the extent that other open-admissions doctoral-level institutions are similar, the implications may have a wider applicability.

We believe it is important to ask of Walden, and similar institutions, who are your students, what is your program, and how productive is it? This paper shall attempt to answer these questions, while focussing on the issue of open-admissions at the Ph.D. level.

The Demand for an "External" Doctorate

Since opening its doors in 1971, Walden University, Institute for Advanced Studies in Education, has enrolled 616 doctoral candidates. Hundreds more potential students applied for admission, were accepted, but did not enroll for a variety of reasons, including the institution's limited ability to absorb students. Many thousands of inquiries and requests for catalogs were made over the same period.

The demand for what is essentially an external doctorate program is almost astonishing. Of course the institution uses mass mailings and advertisements in national magazines to generate interest in its program. And the demand for the doctorate in this degree-oriented society, especially in the public education system, is enormous. What is perhaps surprising is that so much of this demand should be directed to a young, unaccredited, proprietary institution located in the small, relatively isolated city of Naples, Florida.

President Bernard L. Turner has often commented upon his good fortune in discovering Harold Hodgkinson's piece titled "Walden U.: A Working Paper" at the time he was thinking of starting the institution. That paper was "an attempt to develop a new conception of a college in which process and

individuality predominate, and structure and system are seen as means to individualistic ends." [2] While Walden University bears scant resemblance to the utopian (and unlikely) college envisioned by Hodgkinson, the emphasis upon process, flexibility, and respect for individual differences is apparent.

It could be argued that Walden's "pull" is less significant than the "push" of traditional doctoral programs. Most Walden students are unenthusiastic about the traditional program in the contemporary multiversity, and in this respect they have thousands of sympathizers. For example, more than one-fifth of the graduate students at the University of Wisconsin in the mid-1960's were discontented with their graduate education. [3] They complained about depersonalization, the grading system, the Ph.D. "stretch-out," the quality of teaching, and lack of concern for their interests, needs, and even for their intellectual life. Other major universities contained higher proportions of academically discontented students. Weiss's exhaustive study showed that one-fifth to one-third of the doctoral students at ten of the most prestigious American universities in the late 1960's would not select the same institution if they were to start their graduate studies again. [4]

Many of the students who enroll in Walden are likewise dissatisfied with the traditional doctoral program, which they had experienced for an average of about two and one-half years. Some had reached the point where it was clear they would never be able to finish the doctoral program and were forced to seek a non-traditional institution.

In addition, however, virtually all candidates were employed, often in well-paid positions, and simply would not accept the salary loss a leave of absence would require in order to meet the residency requirements of most universities. Walden's one-month residency requirement thus became extremely attractive.

The felt need for a doctorate, the push of multiversity graduate schools, and the pull of a minimal residency requirement combine to generate substantial demand for the Walden program.

Admissions

Walden operates on an open-admissions basis. In practical terms, this means that an applicant presenting transcripts showing completion of at least forty-six semester hours of graduate work, and two letters of recommendation, and having a vocation and dissertation topic appropriate to "the Walden philosophy," will be matriculated.[5] He may then enroll for the summer program if he submits the required tuition before all vacancies are filled.

Of the 413 applications for 1974, six were rejected, 112 were received too late to be considered for admission that year and were transferred to 1975, 295 were matriculated, of which 167 were enrolled. Of the enrollees, fourteen requested "credit for life experience" as they fell short of the forty-six semester hour requirement; thirteen of these petitions were approved. Six additional enrollees were required to make up course work deficiencies ranging from two to six semester hours.[6]

Students

The ideal-type Walden student in 1974 is a 41 year old male public school administrator or college faculty member.[7] He has earned a masters degree and has completed about sixty-five semester hours of post-baccalaureate study.

Autobiographical statements, however, show a considerable diversity and quality of experience brought to Walden by these students. They have received many kinds of distinction, honor, and recognition in academic and in their professions. Service is common on a wide variety of civic, charitable, educational, and political committees, very often in leadership roles. Some are consultants, others are actively engaged on the state level in penal reform and efforts to reduce alcoholism and other forms of drug addiction, and delinquency, and to improve health care, nutrition, and education.

From thirty-seven states and Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia these students came to Walden to increase their expertise, to improve their status, and as one put it, "to increase my clout."

The Walden Doctoral Program

The students attending Walden in 1974 found a four week, ten semester hour package of large and small group instruction and individual advising. Morning presentations, followed by discussion sections, usually consisted of a faculty oral essay on one of the themes found in the thought-provoking texts which all students were expected to read. Texts were Daniel Bell's The Coming of Post-Industrial Society, René Dubos's A God Within, John Kenneth Galbraith's Economics and the Public

Purpose, Robert Ornstein's The Psychology of Consciousness, and Daniel Callahan's The Tyranny of Survival.

Research methods were the subject of afternoon lectures. Small group and individual dissertation advising consumed the remainder of each afternoon.

Student work was graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis by faculty advisors, without the use of examinations or papers. A completed and fairly detailed dissertation proposal served as a surrogate examination.

The summer session faculty was led by Professor Franklin Patterson of the University of Massachusetts, and included Dr. Lillian Bauder (U. of Detroit), Dr. Alan Guskin (Clark U.), Dr. Alex Haggis (U. of Detroit), Dr. Ronald Jackson (Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education), Dr. John Mahoney (The William Paterson College of New Jersey), Dr. Donald McNassor (Claremont Graduate School), Dr. Robert Pitcher (Baldwin-Wallace College), Dr. Pauline Vaillancourt (SUNY-Albany), Dr. Harold Hodgkinson (U. California-Berkeley), Dr. Fletcher Watson (Harvard U.), Dr. Joseph Carol (Superintendent of Rye Neck, New York, Public Schools), Dr. Bob Blancett (a District Superintendent in California), and Dr. James Cook (Albion College).

Upon completion of the month in residency and approval of a dissertation proposal, the student leaves Walden to begin two semesters of independent research at home. A faculty advisor, selected by the student, may be a Walden summer session faculty member or almost any person holding the doctorate and appropriate expertise who is approved by the institution. The doctorate is awarded when the dissertation is approved by the

advisor, two readers appointed by the University, and a University official. No written or oral examination is required at any time from matriculation through graduation.

The quality of the Walden doctoral program, the performance of students while en route to the degree, and the excellence of accepted dissertations are not issues in this paper. These should be thoroughly examined at some time, and presumably will be before the institution is accredited.[8] We do not have sufficient information to pass judgment on these aspects of the Walden experiment, and can only report that the seriousness of purpose, the enthusiasm, and the diligence of the 1974 students and faculty were most impressive. The quality and breadth of experience of the faculty and most of the students were also apparent to this observer.

Open Admissions and Productivity

What we can investigate is the success rate of Walden students. What fraction completes an acceptable dissertation within one year? How many eventually complete the process?

Table 1 shows the percentage of each entering cohort which graduated in successive years.

Three observations are suggested by these data. First, the chances of a Walden student obtaining the doctorate decrease markedly after the first year. Second, the percentage graduating in one year has been declining over the period 1972 to 1974. Third, the institution clearly is not a "diploma mill."

Table 1

Percentage of Students Graduating by Years

Year of Graduation	Summer Session Class of: 1971	1972	1973
1972	49.3	-----	-----
1973	8.3	40.5	-----
1974	4.1	9.8	30.2
Non-Graduates	39.2	49.7	69.8
Total	101%	100%	100%
N	(144)	(153)	(152)

If the entering cohorts are approximately equal in average quality, as we believe, it may be that the University standards for acceptable dissertations are becoming more rigorous and thus the percentage graduating within a year (or more) is decreasing. If this hypothesis is true, one might question the wisdom of an open admissions policy in terms of the reputation and productivity of the institution, and in terms of fairness to the marginal student.

But is it the case that prima facie marginal students fare less well in the Walden environment than those who appear to be better prepared academically? We have some data which can be used to answer this question, by comparing students from the class entering in 1973 who did and who did not graduate in one year. This dichotomy would appear reasonable since the data in Table 1 show a rather small likelihood of graduation for those who do not finish in one year. If it turns out that the non-graduates appear to be less well-prepared

academically than the graduates, it may be that admissions standards should be raised. An external doctorate program, after all, places emphasis on the ability of the individual to complete dissertation research and writing independently, and thus must attract highly capable and self-reliant candidates to a greater degree, perhaps, than the traditional doctoral program.

A number of factors potentially affecting the completion of the dissertation cannot be controlled in this study. Among these are the quantity and quality of faculty advising, the type and difficulty of the research undertaken, the efficiency of Walden dissertation reading and approval processes, the candidate's motivation, access to resources, unencumbered time, etc. Clearly these factors may account for most of the variation in success rates. We have no reason to believe that our subsamples should differ in these respects, and will accept the ceteris paribus assumption, realizing however that a definitive study should attempt to analyze these variables.

In order to examine the hypothesis that academic preparation prior to enrolling in Walden is related to completion of the doctorate, a sample of graduates was compared with a sample of non-graduates from the cohort entering Walden in 1973. That year was chosen because it would be most fair to the young institution to study its most recent candidates, after Walden had some time to work out the kinks in its program. Of the 152 students in this group, thirty per cent had completed acceptable dissertations by July of 1974, while seventy per cent were not eligible for graduation at that time. A sample

of fifteen was selected randomly from each of these groups. The fifteen graduates were then compared with the fifteen non-graduates in terms of the demographic characteristics and academic background variables for which data were available.

Data which could be found on application forms included sex, age, occupation, and quantity of graduate work completed. Undergraduate and graduate grade averages were calculated from the transcripts supplied by the applicants. Walden does not calculate grade averages for its applicants. Grades enter into the selection process only insofar as graduate grades of less than "C" are not counted in the total of forty-six credits of graduate work required for admission. (In the 1973 cohort, thirteen students were admitted with deficiencies or by successful petition for credit for life experience.)

While 23% of the population was female, 6.7% of the graduate sample and 26.7% of the non-graduate sample were female. Individuals employed as educators constituted 88.3% of the population; 66.7% of the non-graduates were educators, while 86.7% of the non-graduates were educators. The median age of the population was 44. Median age for the subsamples was 45 for the graduates and 46 for the non-graduates.

While we have not assessed the interaction between these variables and those to be discussed below, and hence cannot make a firm statement about their joint effects, it would appear that the "ideal type" graduate would have a somewhat higher likelihood of being male and a non-educator than the "ideal type" non-graduate. In terms of age, the types would be about equal.

Since Walden normally requires forty-six semester hours of graduate work prior to admission, we thought it would be interesting to see if there was any relationship between quantity of work completed and graduation from Walden. Table 2 displays these data. All credits were transformed to semester hour equivalents.

Table 2

Prior Graduate Work and Graduation from Walden

Graduate Credits Prior to Entry	Graduates	Non-Graduates	Total
0-45	20.0	6.7	13.3
46-65	46.7	26.7	36.7
66#	33.3	66.7	50.0
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	(15)	(15)	(30)

$x^2 = 3.484$; df = 2; $.100 < p < .250$; $\lambda_A = .333$

The relationship between quantity of previous course work and graduation from Walden is significant at the .250 level. In predictions of graduation from number of previous graduate credits, information about the latter reduces the probability of error by 33% on average. Unfortunately our sample size should have been approximately twice as large in order to properly use the x^2 test for association. If we had used an N of 60 instead of 30, and found the same proportions as Table 2 discloses, x^2 would have been twice as large, and the relationship would have been significant at the .05 level. Our obtained results only suggest that there may be an inverse

relationship between the quantity of previous graduate work and graduation from Walden. If this is so, current admissions policy may be mistaken.

Finally we come to the analysis of the quality of previous work of Walden students. Do the graduates possess academic backgrounds superior to the non-graduates?

It is admitted that grade point averages are at best rough indicators of intelligence, ability, and adequacy of preparation for doctoral work. However, they are the only proxy for these characteristics that we have, as Walden does no testing in its program and does not ask its applicants to submit scores from any test such as the GRE or the Miller Analogies Test. And indeed Walden, in keeping with its open admissions philosophy, does not even look at transcripts except as records of the quantity of work completed. Our calculations of graduate and undergraduate grade point averages, all transformed to a scale where A=4, B=3, etc., provide the data for the following two tables. Grading intervals were established in advance of examination of the data, as were intervals used in all tables; the cut-offs chosen were somewhat arbitrary, based upon an educated guess of appropriate levels. intervals.

Table 3

Quality of Undergraduate Work and Graduation from Walden*

Undergraduate Grade Point Average	Graduates	Non-Graduates	Total
3.2-4.0	23.0	0	11.1
2.6-3.19	30.7	21.4	25.9
≤ 2.59	46.1	78.5	62.9
Total	99.8%	99.9%	99.9%
N	(13)	(14)	(27)

$x^2 = 4.605$; df = 2; p = .100; $\lambda_A = .308$

The relationship between quality of undergraduate work, as measured by grade point average, and graduation from Walden is significant at the .100 level. In predictions of graduation from undergraduate grade point average, information about the latter reduces the probability of error by 31% on average. The same considerations regarding sample size as were discussed above also apply here. Our obtained results suggest that there is a direct relationship between quality of undergraduate work and success at Walden.

* G.P.A.'s could not be calculated for three individuals because of missing transcripts or unusual grading systems. Hence the N of 27 instead of 30.
(insert after table)

Table 4

Quality of Graduate Work and Graduation from Walden

Graduate Grade Point Average	Graduates	Non-Graduates	Total
3.6-4.0	40.0	13.3	26.7
3.2-3.59	40.0	40.0	40.0
≤ 3.19	20.0	46.7	33.3
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	(15)	(15)	(30)

$x^2 = 3.600$; df = 2; $.100 < p < .250$; $\lambda_A = .267$

The relationship between quality of graduate work and graduation from Walden is significant at the .250 level. In predictions of graduation from graduate grade point average, information about the latter reduces the probability of error by 27% on average. Again, the discussion of sample size following Table 2 applies here. Our obtained results suggest that there is a direct relationship between quality of previous graduate work and success at Walden.

It seems that marginal students, as would be expected, are less likely to graduate from Walden than those having more impressive undergraduate and graduate academic records. The University might with to consider employing some measure of aptitude or achievement in its selection process, so as to increase its productivity and to avoid encouraging applicants whose probability of successfully completing a dissertation is remote.

Conclusion

We have tried to present a fair and objective discussion of one institution engaged in the awarding of external doctoral degrees. Discussants of this type of institution generally have very strong feelings in support of or in opposition to this practice. Ignoring for the moment some of the issues which have been debated vigorously elsewhere,[9] and attempting to minimize our own feelings, we have focussed on the question of what academic factors appear to be related to the success rates (ie, graduation) of the doctoral candidates.

Our data show that open admissions does not imply equal chances of success. If the institution chooses to maximize productivity, open admissions will have to be discarded. If, on the other hand, it chooses to maximize opportunity to work for a doctorate, which it is now doing, then prospective students should at least be aware that a high percentage of them will probably not achieve their goal.

NOTES

1. For an extended discussion of Nova, Walden, and the now-defunct Laurence University, see Richard B. Morland, "The External Doctorate in Education: Blessing or Blasphemy?", Phi Delta Kappan, November 1973, 163-168.

2. Harold L. Hodgkinson, "Walden U.: A Working Paper," Soundings, Spring (?) 1969, pp. 172-185.

3. Robert H. Graham, Graduate Student Discontentment, Political Activism, and Academic Reform: A Study of the University of Wisconsin, 1966-1970, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

4. Ann M. Heiss, Doctoral Education in Prestigious Universities, Berkeley: University of California, Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, March 1970, Vol. II, Tables, 172.

5. Although the Admissions Officer processes all applications, final decisions regarding admission and enrollment are made by the Assistant to the President, Mrs. Bernard Turner, in consultation with the President, Mr. Turner. For insight into the "Walden philosophy," see the catalog, seriatim.

6. Applicants with less than 40 semester hours of graduate work may be admitted on the basis of a petition for credit for life experience, which must be approved by the Walden Board of Advisors. Applicants having deficiencies of 1 to 6 credits may be admitted on condition that the deficiency is removed by non-Walden course work prior to graduation.

7. In their professional roles, 56% are primarily administrators, while 44% are teachers. In terms of employment sectors, 37% are working in higher education, 46% are working

in primary or secondary education, and 17% are working in the government and public service, religious programs, private industry, and the armed forces.

8. That Walden would welcome such an examination is made clear in "Open is Open, for Heaven's Sake," Phi Delta Kappan, February 1974, p. 376, written by Dr. John Mahoney, then Dean of Walden University.

9. See, for example, Morland, op. cit., and Donald P. Mitchell, "Let's Set the Record Straight: A Case for Nova University's External Doctorate in Education," Phi Delta Kappan, February 1974, pp. 370-375.